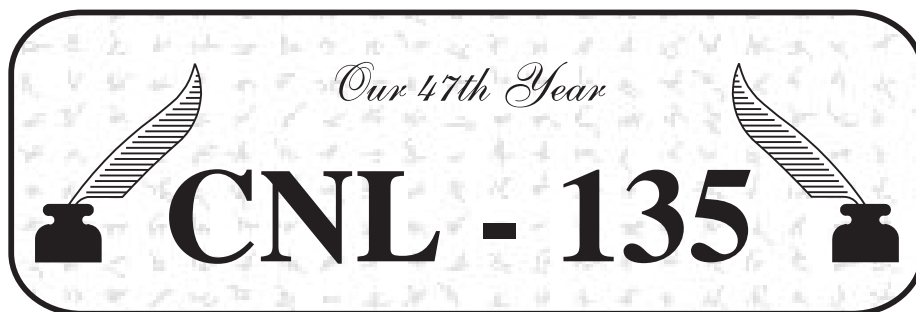


The  
**COLONIAL NEWSLETTER**  
A Research Journal in Early American Numismatics

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**Submitting Material for Publication**

We encourage our readers to consider submitting material on early North American numismatics to CNL for publication. In general, this includes coins, tokens, paper money, and medals that were current before the U. S. Federal Mint began operations in 1793. However, there are certain pieces produced after the 1793 date that have traditionally been considered part of pre-Federal numismatics and they should be included. We cover all aspects of study regarding the manufacture and use of these items. Our very knowledgeable and friendly staff will assist potential authors to finalize submissions by providing advice concerning the text and help with illustrations. Submissions, in either electronic or hardcopy format, should be sent to the editor via the e-mail address given in the editorial or through the ANS at the above postal address.



Welcome to the final issue of the year. Contained in this issue are several submissions on a variety of subjects – hopefully something for everyone. We start off with an exchange of messages between John Adams and Dr. Roger Moore, which is presented as a Letter to the Editor. This communication pertains to the paper on fake Virginia halfpence that appeared in the previous issue.

Next up is a report on a metal detecting find of a 1781 imitation British halfpenny. The report is authored by the finder, Kevin Jackson, with assistance from Dr. Roger Moore who recently co-authored an excellent paper updating information on this series. This paper appeared in CNL-132 and was titled "1781 Imitation British Halfpence Update." It is believed that this is the first 1781-dated imitation British halfpenny to be recovered from U.S. soil.

The paper in our last issue which examined fake Virginia halfpence prompted a number of collectors to examine their reproductions. Jim Biancarosa contacted the principal author of this paper, Dr. Roger Moore, and arraigned for him to examine six of his Virginia reproductions. Two of Jim's coins resulted in new and interesting observations which are detailed in an update paper titled "More on Virginia Copper Coinage Counterfeits, Forgeries, and Facsimiles."

Next, David Gladfelter reports the discovery of a signed small change bill dated March 10, 1796, issued by the Common Council of the City of New-Brunswick, New Jersey. Previously, only remainder notes of this issue were known.

In our April 2007 issue we reported the untimely death of Mike Ringo. Mike was one of the most knowledgeable and highly respected numismatists specializing in the field of early American coinage. John Kleeberg, a CNL associate editor, had a good working relationship with Mike and has provided us with a fascinating personal look at Mike while detailing many of Mike's discoveries in numismatics. See John's paper titled "Remembering Mike Ringo."

Our final paper, titled "1748-dated Counterfeit British Halfpenny Source Identified," locates the counterfeit operation that produced several die-linked counterfeit halfpennies. Since counterfeit operations rarely, if ever, kept records of their activities, it is difficult to determine when, where and by whom the many counterfeit halfpence varieties were produced. Robert Bowser, however, made a significant contribution to this field of inquiry when he accessed the criminal court proceedings of the Old Bailey in London. Here he found detailed testimony by the arresting officers in several cases involving counterfeiting of English and Irish coins. Some of the testimony provides truly fascinating details about small-time counterfeiting operations. One case provided enough information on the coins being struck to identify the likely variety produced by that operation. Robert's research has opened a door which will hopefully lead to the identification of other counterfeit copper coin sources.

Finally, I am very pleased to announce that CNL Associate Editor Lou Jordan has been awarded the 2006 Fred Bowman Numismatic Research Award for his paper titled "The DK Token and Small Change in the Early Seventeenth Century Settlement at Ferryland, Newfoundland." The Fred Bowman award is issued once a year to the author of a well-researched paper on a Canadian numismatic subject. Lou's paper appeared in the August 2006 issue of CNL. A copy of the award appears on the following page. Congratulations Lou!

Gary Trudgen  
gtrudgen@aol.com



LETTER  
to the Editor

The following exchange of messages was received following the publication of CNL-134, the August 2007 issue. The first message from John Adams was forwarded to Roger Moore since he is the principal author of the article on which John comments. Roger answered John's questions as presented in the second message below.

=====

Dear Gary Trudgen –

Congratulations on a fine issue, led by that superb article on Virginia halfpennies ["Virginia Halfpenny Counterfeits, Forgeries and Facsimiles"]. Congratulations to all four authors!! How about a follow-up from them in order to address the question posed at the outset – Why were any of the forgeries made? Also, do they think that the various forgeries are from the same source or multiple sources? Do they suspect that the forger is a club [ANS] member?

Best, John Adams     July 17, 2007

=====

Dear Mr. Adams:

Thank you for having read and enjoyed our paper titled "Virginia Halfpenny Counterfeits, Forgeries, and Facsimiles." You raise some intriguing questions in your letter to the editor. Since the Virginia halfpence are fairly abundant and available in high condition, an excellent question is why anyone would attempt to produce these forgeries. I believe it comes down to either: 1) a greed based economic reason that would benefit the forger by pricing the copy as if it were genuine and at a level significantly more than the cost of making it or 2) or an altruistic motive that would allow a numismatist, who could not otherwise afford a genuine coin, to obtain examples of the Virginia coinage at a minimal cost.

A genuine Virginia halfpenny in today's market in UNC condition costs between \$1000 and \$4000 depending on the variety. The cost is extraordinarily low, considering we are discussing uncirculated coins that were minted almost 250 years ago, but still steep in price for the modest budget. Most of the forgeries discussed in the paper were not in uncirculated condition. The processes utilized in making a cast forgery resulted in a smeared appearance which can be passed off as a circulated coin. Circulated Virginia halfpence in today's market in a condition similar to which most fakes are found cost between \$100 and \$600, depending on the variety. The no-stop varieties are rarer and therefore demand a higher premium for type collectors. Making a cast forgery in today's market is relatively inexpensive, if one has the proper equipment – probably the cost is in the range of \$6 to \$12 for each reproduction. The higher the quality of the cast forgery using the latest in the state of the art forging equipment, such as centrifugal casters, will raise the fixed cost to the forger and make the forgery more expensive but still much less than a genuine coin. Therefore one can understand that if the motive of the forger was greed, a significant profit could be realized. If altruism was the motive, large numbers of collectors could obtain a good replica of a

Virginia colonial halfpenny very inexpensively. Struck forgeries are far more expensive to produce and require a greater level of artistic expertise. I would expect that most struck copies, that are not obvious facsimiles, were made with the greed motive in mind.

This leads me into the other two questions that you ask. Did the forgeries discussed in the paper come from a single or from multiple sources and could some of the esteemed members of the American Numismatic Society have been involved in these projects? In evaluating the cast forgeries presented in the paper, I would hazard a guess they have a common source from someone interested in colonial coins. The two halves of the coins are put together with a proper axis orientation and the casting methods produce a relatively homogeneous product, in spite of different varieties being made. However, the deceptive struck forgery discussed in this issue of *The Colonial Newsletter* is so different that I believe it comes from another and perhaps more recent source than the cast copies. If this struck copy had been artificially worn, it could be deceptive enough to fool experts into thinking that it is a new variety. As to whether the forgers of either the cast copies or the struck copy were ANS members, I would have to defer to the forgers' underlying motivation. I would hope that if greed were the motivation and the "coins" were sold at the same price as genuine Virginian halfpence after they were made, then the forger was a dishonest person and I would hope was not a member. If on the other hand, the "coins" were sold slightly above manufacture cost to increase the numismatic interest in the Virginia coinage and supply examples to those that could not ordinarily afford the real thing, then I would hope that the forgers were ANS members. Obviously the forgeries would have to have been produced prior to the Hobby Protection Act, since the word "COPY" is not countermarked on any of these fakes. Regardless of whether an ANS member had a hand in the production of the forgeries or not, they were made by someone knowledgeable about the Virginia coinage and with an outlet for selling the fakes once they were made. Perhaps some of our older readers might remember when and where these fakes began to appear and where they might have been produced.

Roger Moore, MD    August 1, 2007

**Imitation 1781 British Halfpenny Recovered in Virginia**

by

**Kevin Jackson; Winchester, VA**

with assistance from

**Roger Moore, M.D.; Moorestown, NJ****(TN-200)**

Having a love for metal detecting while living in the northern Virginia area is a true blessing. One is never far from an old homestead, war campsite, battlefield or other gathering place. I, Kevin Jackson, live within 20 miles of Winchester, VA, which changed hands more than 70 times over the course of the Civil War, so most of my time metal detecting is spent searching for Civil War relics. In a land with so much history, other finds are also bound to show up periodically.

On April 8, 2007, Easter Sunday, my family met for dinner at my parents' house along the Shenandoah River in Clarke County. I had been metal detecting the day before and still had my equipment in my vehicle. After dinner I decided to try metal detecting their field that borders the Shenandoah River. In one small area near the edge of a hillside, I started getting frequent signals from iron objects. This finding while metal detecting is typical for an old homestead that has deteriorated or burned down, leaving the iron nails behind. While detecting I also found older civilian buttons, a small brass thimble and a fancy shoe buckle. The buttons were made of a material called tombac, which dated the buttons to the later eighteenth to early nineteenth century. Since Virginia was one of the key areas settled during the Revolutionary War era, making finds dating to the late eighteenth century is not unusual. My hope was to discover a coin in the area because I knew it would stand a good chance of dating from the same period.

The next weekend found me back at my parents and again searching the same small area where I found most of the buttons. After digging up a few more buttons, I finally pulled a coin from the ground and could immediately see that it was very old. I stopped detecting and took the coin to my parents' house to wash away enough dirt to read the date 1781. Researching my find on the Internet produced very little information on the coin although I was able to learn that it was a contemporary imitation British halfpenny.<sup>1</sup> My searching on the Internet also led me to Ray Williams and Dr. Philip Mossman who, with the aid of Dr. Roger Moore, were very helpful in providing me details on the coin.

The coin was identified as a 1781 Newman 41-81B variety imitation British halfpenny, as listed in a recently updated attribution guide for the 1781 varieties.<sup>2</sup> (See figure 1.) I came to find out that this is perhaps the only 1781-dated coin yet recovered from U.S. soil. However, with the increasing commerce occurring between the colonies and Great Britain, as well as the migration of British peoples to the Virginia shores, it is not unexpected that any coins circulating in Britain would find their way to the colonies. The 1781 was made in England but not made for exclusive use in America according to the classic article by Eric Newman.<sup>3</sup>

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1. This halfpenny forgery is termed an "imitation" rather than a "counterfeit" since it has a non-regal date. George III regal halfpence were dated 1770 through 1775.

2. Moore, Roger A., Palmer, David L. and Newman, Eric P., "1781 Imitation British Halfpence Update," *The Colonial Newsletter*, December 2006, sequential pages 3079-88.

3. Newman, Eric P., "Were Counterfeit British Style Halfpence Dated 1785 Made Specifically for American Use?" *ANSMN* 33, The American Numismatic Society, 1988, pp. 205-23 and plates.



**Figure 1:** Recently recovered imitation British halfpenny, Newman 41-81B. Discovered in Clarke County, Virginia, in a field bordering the Shenandoah River. It is difficult to see in the photo but there is a large X scratched into the reverse. Perhaps someone who handled the coin before it was lost realized that it was a forgery and attempted to warn others. [Shown approximately 1.5X actual size.] *Image courtesy Kevin Jackson.*



**Figure 2:** The same variety as the recovered specimen. [Shown approximately 1.5X actual size.] *Image courtesy Roger Moore, M.D..*

A general observation on the 1781 coinage<sup>4</sup> is that there are relatively few die pairings, meaning the die used to make the obverse for a variety is only used for that variety and not paired with any other reverse die. The Newman 41-81B is the only variety having the 41 obverse and the only one with the 81B reverse. This is similar to the 1773 Virginia copper halfpence made at the Royal Mint in England, where exclusive die pairing with little die sharing is the rule.<sup>5</sup> For the Virginia coinage this finding is attributed to the extremely tight quality control of the Royal Mint. However, for this 1781 imitation product, a similar argument is harder to make. No matter what the actual reason, there is little die sharing between the seven known obverse dies and six reverse dies of the 1781 coinage.<sup>6</sup>

I am told that this particular coin, though having some porosity, is in excellent condition compared to other

available study coins. Compared to Roger Moore's example of this variety (see figure 2), my coin has more detail on both the obverse and reverse. The Newman 41-81B variety is rare with less than ten documented coins of this variety known at this time. The rarity makes this find all the more intriguing.

Tall grass and ticks have kept me out of my parents' field since my discovery, but next winter I plan to do a thorough search of the surrounding grounds. Within a few weeks of finding my coin I also found a Union officer's sword buckle, a U.S. cartridge box plate and both an 1819 and 1850 large cent piece, as well as one of the largest collections of pull tabs and pop bottle caps in the Shenandoah Valley. However, my imitation 1781 coin remains my most prized find to date.

**Acknowledgement:** The authors would like to thank Dr. Phil Mossman for his skilled input and direction. In addition, Gary Trudgen needs special thanks, as always, for his expert editing and improvements.

4. Moore, Palmer, and Newman, *op. cit.*

5. Moore, Roger A., Anthony, Alan, Newman, Eric P., "Virginia Halfpence Variety Update with Revised Die Interlock Chart," *The Colonial Newsletter*, April 2005, sequential pages 2797-2806.

6. Moore, Palmer, and Newman, *op. cit.*



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## More on Virginia Copper Coinage Counterfeits, Forgeries, and Facsimiles

by

Roger A. Moore, M. D.; Moorestown, NJ

and

James A. Biancarosa; Willington, FL

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**Introduction:** When dealing with colonial coins and their reproductions, conscientious authors will frequently delay publishing their research until they are sure that the subject has been thoroughly and completely explored. However, the very nature of colonial numismatics is such that coins residing in older collections are frequently not available for critical evaluation by the interested author. There have been many important manuscripts which have unfortunately lapsed into obscurity when the author has passed on, death having intervened prior to the author achieving the desired level of perfection. In support of expedited, though incomplete, publication of new knowledge is that the simple appearance in print of a manuscript often leads readers to delve into their own collections and discover additional information – post publication – that is important for the knowledge base.

The paper appearing in the August 2007 issue of *The Colonial Newsletter* titled “Virginia Halfpenny Counterfeits, Forgeries and Facsimiles”<sup>1</sup> provided an in-depth look at various reproductions of the Virginia coinage which have been produced over the decades. All known reproductions from major collections were evaluated, but the authors realized and stated in their manuscript that other Virginia fakes most likely existed within the holdings of other collectors. Once the paper was published, it stimulated a number of collectors to examine their Virginia coppers and additional information was forthcoming. In particular, a long time member of the American Numismatist Society, Jim Biancarosa, re-examined his extensive accumulation of colonial reproductions with particular emphasis on his nine fake Virginia coppers. Six of these were personally examined by the primary author of this update and from this examination new and interesting additional observations were made on two coins, which are detailed now.

**Peter Rosa Virginia Penny:** As described in the original paper and previously documented,<sup>2</sup> Peter Rosa made reproductions of both the Virginia halfpenny and the Virginia penny. For the collector acquainted with the appearance of true Virginia coinage, these facsimiles are not at all deceptive. The Virginia penny reproduction was larger in size than the halfpenny, and had denticles circumferentially around the outer border. Dory Development continues to make both a Virginia penny and a halfpenny using the same methods utilized by Peter Rosa with the primary difference between the two denominations being their size.

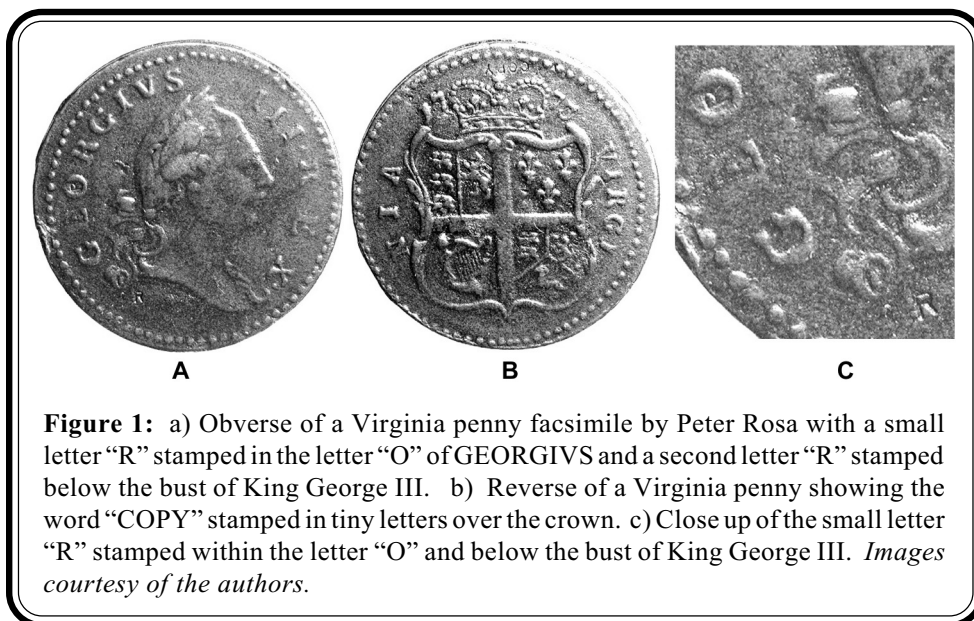
It is well documented that Peter Rosa deeply disliked “disfiguring” his reproductions with the word “copy” stamped into them, as required by the Hobby Protection Act of 1973. Many examples exist of his Virginia coinage reproductions which lack the word “copy” stamped on either the obverse or reverse. Others exist with the word “Becker” stamped into the edge. Still others have the word “copy” punched into the coin’s surface in tiny letters, while other

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1. Moore, R., Martin, S., Anthony, A., Veach, W., “Virginia Halfpenny Counterfeits, Forgeries, and Facsimiles,” *The Colonial Newsletter*, Volume 47, Number 2, August 2007, pp 3165-85.

2. Kleeberg, John M., “More on Peter Rosa Copies,” ed. Horem, Wayne, E-Sylum, Volume 7. Number 05, February 1, 2004. “Peter Rosa’s Replicas of Colonial Coins,” *The Colonial Newsletter*, Volume 42, Number 1, April 2002, pp 2330-35.

coins fulfilled the requirement of the law by having the word “copy” stamped onto the surface in large letters. A new addition to this grouping is a Virginia penny reproduction having the single tiny letter “R” stamped on the obverse inside the “O” of GEORGIVS.

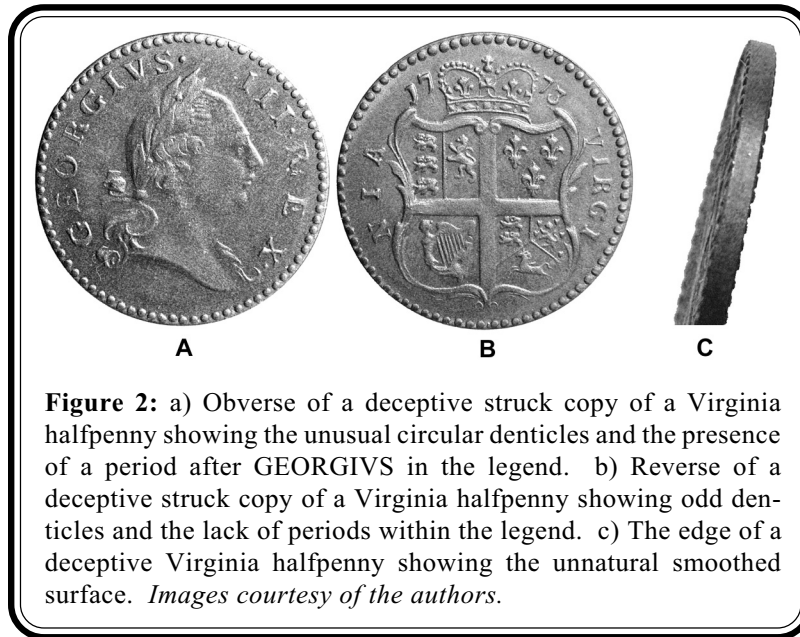


The obverse of the coin (see Figure 1-a) shows a tiny letter “R” stamped inside the “O” of GEORGIVS and another letter “R” punched below King George’s bust. These can be seen in better detail using magnification (see Figure 1-c). Though the meaning of this letter is not officially known, we can surmise it was meant to indicate that the coin was a replica. It is also unknown whether it was Peter Rosa or some other manufacturer of these fakes who stamped “R” into the coin’s surface. In fact, placement of the punched “R” might have been performed by someone other than the primary producer of the coin. Arguing against this is that the patina is the same within the incused “R” as the patina on the surface of the coin, indicating that the punching of the “R” most likely occurred near the same time that the coin was produced. The reverse of the coin bears the inverted word “COPY” in tiny letters over the crown (see Figure 1-b). An additional example of this reproduction exists in the Biancarosa reference collection with the letter “R” stamped only inside the letter “O” and no other letters punched anywhere on the edge, the obverse, or the reverse.

The coin weights 142.5 grains which is well above the expected weight of 116.7 grains for a true Virginia halfpenny and its diameter is 27.6 mm which is also larger than the expected diameter of 25.2 mm. In addition, the crudeness of the coin makes it easily identifiable as a reproduction, as does a circular line bisecting the length of the edge, where the two halves of the fake were joined.

**Deceptive Struck Forgery:** Very few deceptive struck forgeries of Virginia halfpence exist although another has been found (see Figures 2-a and 2-b). The coin weighs 118.2 grains which is well within the expected range of a true Virginia halfpenny, from 107.1 to 122.5 grains.<sup>3</sup> The diameter is 26.6 mm on the x-axis and 26.5 mm on the y-axis, which is slightly

3. Moore, R., Martin, S., Anthony, A., Veach, W., *op. cit.*



**Figure 2:** a) Obverse of a deceptive struck copy of a Virginia halfpenny showing the unusual circular denticles and the presence of a period after GEORGIVS in the legend. b) Reverse of a deceptive struck copy of a Virginia halfpenny showing odd denticles and the lack of periods within the legend. c) The edge of a deceptive Virginia halfpenny showing the unnatural smoothed surface. *Images courtesy of the authors.*

larger than expected for a true Virginia halfpenny. A sampling of 21 genuine Virginia halfpennies shows an expected range of x-axis diameters from 24.9 to 26.1 mm and y-axis diameters from 24.7 to 25.8 mm. The coin's specific gravity is 8.8 which corresponds to a true Virginia halfpenny having a specific gravity range from 8.64 to 8.99. However, the most deceptive part of the coin is the well made bust of King George on the obverse and an

exact replication of the crown and shield on the reverse. In addition, the letter punches used to make the obverse and reverse legends look authentic. Of interest, the obverse matches fairly closely to a Newman 7 obverse, except a period or stop has been added after GEORGIVS. Since the Newman 7 obverse is a no-period variety, this could be called a new obverse. In regard to the reverse, it matches fairly closely the Newman D reverse, but no stops were placed in the legend following "NIA" or "73". Since all genuine Virginia halfpennies have stops in the reverse legend, this reverse could be considered a new variety. It is clear that the model from which the dies were made for this forgery was a Newman 7-D halfpenny.

The primary indicator that this coin is a forgery is the unnatural and rounded appearance of the denticles. Another factor highly suggestive of a forgery is the smoothed edge (see Figure 2-c). The coin was obtained in a group lot<sup>4</sup> with the description of a "somewhat deceptive" struck copy. The authors feel that if artificial wear were applied to the coin that it would be a very deceptive struck copy.

**Conclusion:** Two additional important observations have been added to the growing list of odd and clever replicas of the Virginia copper coinage. These coins came to light solely due to a reader's interest in the publication of preliminary observations surrounding fake Virginia coins. It is hoped that other readers will be stimulated to look at their Virginian copper coinage in light of these new, as well as the previously made, observations. In addition, the authors would be very interested if any of the readers of this journal know where the struck forgery described in this paper was made, and whether the dies used to produce it are still in existence.

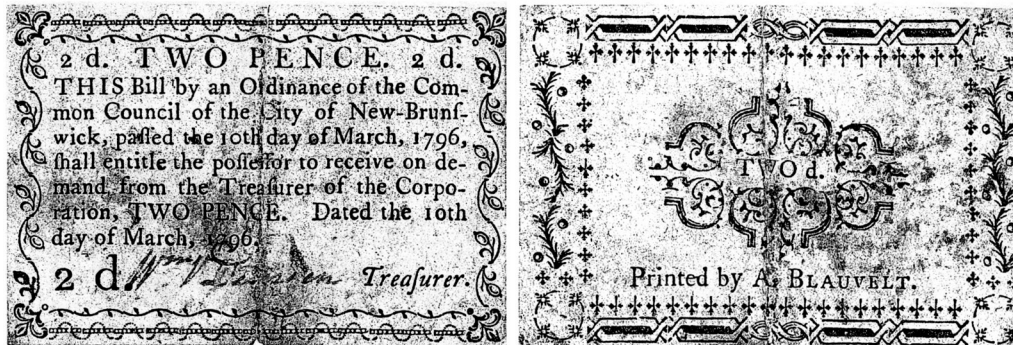
4. McCawley and Grellman C4 Auction, "The Scott Barnes Sale," October 12, 1996, lot 620.

## PUTTING A NAME ON IT

from

David D. Gladfelter; Moorestown, NJ

(TN-201)



Discovery specimen of a small change bill issued by the Common Council of the City of New-Brunswick, NJ, signed by William Van Deursen, city treasurer, and dated March 10, 1796.

Shown here is the discovery specimen of a signed and issued example of the March 10, 1796 small change bills authorized by ordinance of the Common Council of the City of New-Brunswick, New Jersey. Of the 2d denomination, it bears the signature of City Treasurer William Van Deursen, who served in that office from 1796 to 1816.

The 1796 bills were issued in denominations of 1d, 2d, 3d and 4d and show the imprint of Abraham Blauvelt, a local printer who shared in the printing of legislative proceedings with official State Printer Isaac Collins toward the end of Collins's career. In the George W. Wait reference<sup>1</sup> they are designated as Nos. 1655, 1657, 1659 and 1660, respectively, all with an estimated rarity of 5 to 10 known. They followed a 1791-dated issue of 1d, 2d and 3d city obligations, also printed by Blauvelt (Wait 1654, 1656 and 1658, all with an estimated extant population of 1 to 5 known), which had become due two months earlier. Although most of the 1791 bills were redeemed, a few signed and issued examples do survive. Until discovery of the signed 2d bill of 1796, all examples of this latter issue were remainder-only.<sup>2</sup>

The discovery specimen was lot 561 in Stack's May 13, 2003 sale and its face is plated in the catalog.

Thanks to Hsien-min Tang of the New Brunswick Free Public Library for research assistance.

1. Wait, George W., *New Jersey's Money*, The Newark Museum Association, 1976.

2. A remainder note is defined as "A note printed for issue but never placed in circulation; such notes are usually found in new condition, unsigned, and unnumbered." *The Macmillan Encyclopedic Dictionary of Numismatics*, Richard G. Doty, 1982.

## Remembering Mike Ringo

from

John M. Kleeberg; New York, NY

This is not a formal obituary of Michael K. Ringo. A formal obituary should contain the outline of an individual's life, plus a summation of that person's influence, whether for good or bad. These recollections serve a different purpose. Mike made numerous discoveries of coins and varieties, but he was slow to publish what he found, and he went to the grave having put a miniscule fraction of what he knew into print. I cannot ensure that Mike gets credit for all the discoveries he made, but I can record some of them.

It was probably Eric P. Newman who told me about Mike Ringo. His name came up when I was discussing with Eric Newman and Joe Lasser whom to invite to the Coinage of the Americas Conference on pre-federal coinage, which was held in May 1991, so that would have been August 1990. I started work at the American Numismatic Society as a curator on February 13, 1990. It was at the time that the first Anton-Kesse book on counterfeit halfpence came out, and I wanted to make sure that the Society's collection of counterfeit halfpence got adequately cataloged. The matter became more pressing as I worked on the editing of Phil Mossman's book, which put counterfeit halfpence front and center as one of the main portions of the circulating medium in the thirteen colonies and the early United States. It soon became clear that Mike was the person I needed to consult to get the Society's collection into decent shape. But he proved extraordinarily difficult to get to visit the Society. He wasn't unfriendly – just reserved, and obviously busy with a lot of things. At that time Mike was hitting the floors of all the regional coin shows, and finding a lot of good stuff in the process. New York City in the early 1990s still had several coin shows – the Grand Central and the Metropolitan Coin Show. (By the middle of that decade those coin shows had ceased.) I ran into Mike Ringo at an EAC regional meeting at the Metropolitan Coin Show in May 1992, and he showed me a French coin with a *fleur-de-lis* in an oval and asked if I thought it was related to the billon *quinzains* of 1641. I memorized the coin, went back to the Society and found that it was a French feudal coin, which was cataloged in Poey d'Avant; found the reference in Poey d'Avant, photocopied it and mailed it to Mike. Mike was grateful for that attribution, and the ice was broken.

However, it was not until Bill Noyes began to visit the Society regularly in the early 1990s that I was able to get Mike Ringo to do the same. Noyes had already published his photo book references on large cents at this time, but he was doing re-shoots of the cents, plus several other projects, so he came by the Society regularly. The other projects included a study by Freeman Craig and Holland Wallace on silver crowns of the Americas and a record of Connecticut coppers in the Society collection that Bob Martin was compiling. I had Noyes nag Ringo to come to the Society; and Bill Noyes is a very effective nagger. In the mid-1990s Bill Noyes and Mike Ringo and Bob Martin would come to the Society every couple of months or so. It was a nicely mixed group, since Noyes and I can be talkative and gossipy, and Mike was fairly quiet, so things balanced out.

Mike planned to produce a series of attribution guides to colonial and confederation coinages, starting with the series generally known as "Machins"; his book would replace the Vlack plates. Noyes made the photographs; thanks to the ANS collection, Mike had access to most of the varieties. Mike got quite far with this, but was ultimately stymied by his perfectionism. Mike needed a photograph of a Vlack 9-87NY (the Ceorcius/Liber natus mule); Breen says there are only three known. Mike suspected that it was in a private collection to which I had access; I looked through that collection twice, but could not locate it, and told Mike he should resign himself to just

re-using someone else's photograph. But he would not do that, and continued to seek perfection. Similarly, Mike needed a photograph of a Vlack 16-86A. Breen lists this as "unique?" It is not unique, because I found another example in the ANS collection. The ANS specimen is in lower grade and is marred (or enhanced, depending on your point of view) by a counterstamp. I told Mike that in the case of this rare piece we could surely settle for the ANS coin. But Mike continued to search for the higher grade example, so that he might use that photograph instead. I tried to convince Mike that we had located and photographed a vast number of rarities in the series in better condition than had ever been done before; but he kept on looking for the Holy Grail of the better coin, instead of fixing his ideas in print.

Bill Noyes is fairly tolerant of coins of all types, so long as they are made out of copper; but even Noyes's tolerance was stretched thin by the crude coins that Mike had him photograph. Noyes complained to me, "Ringo is having me photograph all these fake coins!" I replied, "You mean to say contemporary counterfeits, and contemporary counterfeits happen to be important historical documents." "No," replied Noyes, "the coins Ringo has me photograph are fake! And I mean FAKE!"

Once Mike began to visit the ANS regularly, his study and attribution of the collection was everything I wished for; he identified many rare varieties in the trays and corrected misattributions. Mike discovered that the ANS had some extraordinarily rare pieces in the Machin series; I noticed that some of these pieces shared a common patina and a common provenance. This led to one of the first fruits of our collaboration, my article on the Montclair, New Jersey hoard of 1922, published in the *American Journal of Numismatics* for 1995-96. In the article I note that the hoard contained two examples of Vlack 24-72C, and one of Vlack 23-87C. In each case I noted that the attributions had been done by Mike Ringo. The coins were quite rare, being considered R-7. I later came to say that in the colonial series there are only two rarity conditions: R-8, before Mike Ringo begins to go out to look for examples, and R-2, after Mike Ringo has looked for examples.

Mike and Bob Martin did their best to educate me about Connecticut coppers. I learned, to my surprise, that Muttonheads come in two varieties: a common one (which I knew about) and a rare piece (which I had never seen until Bob Martin brought one in to teach me about it). I was an intractable pupil, but at least I learned whom to ask. One time I was going to see a collection that I knew contained some of the greatest Connecticut copper rarities there are. I called up Bob Martin, and said, "Bob, when someone shows me Connecticut coppers it is a case of pearls being cast before swine. I have this chance to see one of the greatest Connecticut collections in the country; what should I look at?" Bob told me, "Oh that collection – the one you want to look at is the Miller 1.4-ww." On my visit the collector asked me what I would like to see, and I said, with some trepidation, "Uh, Miller 1.4-ww." "John, I'm glad you said that, you have excellent taste, that's my favorite Connecticut variety too." And he took out the piece and we admired it. Damnedest looking Connecticut copper I ever saw. Of course, I only knew what to look at because I had gotten a cheat sheet from Bob Martin.

Having decided to publish the Montclair hoard, I then had to make sure that the ANS computer catalog was up-to-date with its attributions. As I did this I came across a Vlack 6-76A overstruck on a Spanish coin. This piece is illustrated in *Studies on Money in Early America*, and there the undertype is described as an 8 maravedies. Being a conscientious cataloger, I obtained the Cayon-Castan catalog of Spanish coins and tried to attribute the undertype further. Yet the undertype did not look like the 8 maravedies listed. Finally I realized that it was not modeled on any copper coin, but rather was a counterfeit in copper of a pistareen of the pretender Charles III of Spain of the 1700s. The ANS collection is so rich that it contains another example of this

variety, also struck over a pistareen, a gorgeous red-brown piece in uncirculated condition, the gift of F. C. C. Boyd in 1956. Mike and I began to refer to that piece as "THE COIN!" in imitation of a term used by EAC types for the 1793 cent of S-4 variety, originally the Mickley-Crosby-Dr. Hall piece. That 6-76A is truly one of the greatest items in the Machins series. The undertype was clear enough that Mike could make out a letter "G" on the undertype, which he observed punchlinked with the letters "G" on the Vlack 6-76A. This was an important discovery, evidence that Mould and Atlee were making counterfeit pistareens as well as counterfeit halfpence. I urged Mike to publish his discovery, and he said he would – but first he wanted to find some examples of the counterfeit pistareen undertype that were not overstruck.

This discovery urged me to go through the ANS collection, looking for counterfeit Spanish pieces. When I began to do this I did not know that there were, in fact, two types of 2 reales: the *plata nacional* (regular 2 reales), four of which will compose a Spanish milled dollar; and the *plata provincial* (pistareens), which is 20% less in value, five of which will equal a Spanish milled dollar. So I separated out anything of the 2 reales denomination that was counterfeit. I noticed that quite a number were dated 1787 ("the magic year" for Confederation coinages); I also recognized die links. Finally I learned the difference between proper 2 reales and pistareens, and the result was two articles: one on the pistareen, and once I had got that out of the way, I embarked upon a die study of counterfeit 2 reales.

The project of the Montclair Hoard, the pistareen article, and finally the die study of the counterfeit 2 reales stretched out over nearly a decade. Meanwhile Mike was making discovery after discovery. He showed me two extraordinary coins at the Anaheim ANA in August 1995. One was a crude blacksmith type counterfeit of a 2 reales, overstruck on a large cent; when rotated slightly, the crude portrait of Charles III looked like a moose, so I will always think of it as "the moose head coin." It came in an envelope from S. S. Heal, a great Canadian numismatist of the early twentieth century. Robinson S. Brown III passed by and I introduced him and Mike, and we tried to persuade Robbie Brown that although large cents are great, they become even better if they are overstruck with the dies of a crude Canadian counterfeit. We did not succeed.

The other coin was a piece that a friend of ours, whose opinion we both respected, had dismissed as an electrotpe shell. Here I had the advantage of working with the ANS collection, so that I was not restricted to U.S. pieces, but might handle a Dutch leeuwendaalder one day, a French eighteenth century medal the next. I recognized that the piece that Mike showed me was not an electrotpe shell, but a French lead cliché, strengthened by pasting paper on the back, and coated with bronze on the front. It was a cliché of the reverse of the Castorland *demi écu*. Then we had to make sure that it was from the original dies. Mike walked across the aisle to Tom Rinaldo to see if he had a good photograph of the original *demi écu*. Tom did even better than that; he let us borrow an *original silver demi écu* for comparison; and, yes, the dies matched. This cliché would be worthy of a separate number and entry in Breen's encyclopedia – right before number 1058. Mike showed it to Richard Margolis, and Margolis confirmed this attribution.

Another lead splasher of the reverse of the Castorland *demi écu* has since turned up in the Ford collection, sold on January 18, 2005, lot 150, bought from Marcel Platt in Paris in 1967; the cataloger has doubts as to when these pieces were made, because the die is heavily rusted. Mike Ringo's specimen could help solve these questions, because as I recall it had a piece of paper pasted on its back with what looked like French eighteenth century printing.

Also at the 1995 ANA, I noticed that Mike had copies of the Vlack photographic plates of counterfeit halfpence, and I asked to buy a set. Mike sold it to me, and added, "And you'll want to buy a set of the attribution plates for Massachusetts cents and half cents, too, right?" Actually,

I had had no intention of buying them, but it would have been impolite to say no, and so I ended up saying, "Er, um, yeah, I guess so..." and bought those plates too. About six months later I was helping Phil Mossman to attribute some Massachusetts cents, and produced my copies of the photo plates. "Wherever did you get these?" asked Phil. "I've been looking all over for a set." "Oh, Mike Ringo had them in his case at the Anaheim ANA, and I knew they would be useful, so I snatched them up." The plates have proven very useful since, although I never would have bought them if Mike had not talked me into buying them. Mike and I co-operated in tracking down Cobwright. It was Mike who donated to the ANS library a copy of Cobwright's study of evasive halfpence with its charming title, *A journey through the Monkalokian rain forests in search of the Spiney Fubbaduck*.

Eric P. Newman often remarked to me that Mike's knowledge of die varieties was truly astonishing; Phil Mossman likewise marveled at Mike's "eidetic memory." Curiously, once Mike had sold a coin, he often forgot he had ever owned it. In December 1998 he became very interested in counterfeit halfpence with dramatic straight edge clips, believing that the straight edge clips would tell us something about the method of manufacture. Mike found a Vlack 14-84A with a straight edge clip. I remarked that there was counterfeit 2 reales with a similar straight edge. Mike had no recollection of that piece – even though he had sold the piece to the collector. There was also one unusual case when a collector actually cherry-picked a rare Connecticut copper from Mike Ringo. Mike had just acquired a group of Connecticut coppers and had set them aside in his case, intending to attribute them later; and the collector bought the coin unattributed. Mike later visited me at the ANS, and said, "Could you show me a copper of that variety – so I may impress it onto my stupid brain?" The lesson of that episode was to attribute everything – and to attribute it as carefully as one possibly can.

One of Mike's discoveries was what may be a contemporary counterfeit of the bar copper, which he showed to Walter Breen at the 1982 Boston ANA; the piece is mentioned in Breen's encyclopedia, although Mike is not named. Mike still owned the piece in 1997. Tony Terranova called the dies of the counterfeit the "bastard dies." I also have notes of reports from Bob Martin of discoveries by Mike Ringo. In April 1999 Martin told me of two Fugio varieties that Mike had discovered: Newman 17-T and Newman 24 –TT. Another note is of Martin telling me that Mike had turned up a rare Connecticut copper, 1787 Miller 16.4-A2. In October 1998 Mike showed me a 1787 Miller 52-G.1 that he had got at Long Beach. The ANS collection had two of this die variety. All three examples showed evidence of a die clash. I told Mike that I was disappointed in him, because he had not been able to find the earlier die state, before the die clash. One time Mike brought in a copper counterfeit of a Portuguese *moidore* overstruck on an interesting undertype – a halfpence, I think. I had brought out a book on counterfeiting, *Clip a Bright Guinea*, to show it to Mike. The book had a photograph of dies for a counterfeit *moidore*; I looked more closely – and realized that the counterfeit *moidore* that Mike was showing me was a die match for the dies illustrated in the book.

In August 1990, at the Seattle ANA, one of the leading experts on contemporary counterfeits acquired a remarkable piece, a counterfeit 1818 large cent with an endless wreath on the reverse. This counterfeit is mentioned in the very rare catalog of Edward Maris's collection. Del Bland happened to own a plated example of that catalog, and I remember Walter Breen and Del Bland discussing the piece and looking it up in Del's plated Maris. The description reads, "On the reverse, the wreath is *endless*. May have been a counterfeit of the day." I did not quite understand what they were talking about at the time (my experience in numismatics then was all of six months), but I committed it to memory, resolving that I would understand it eventually. The specimen found at the Seattle ANA was not the Maris piece, but a different example. But where was the Maris piece? In 1998, someone walked onto the bourse floor of a coin show in New



England, and sold the Maris piece to Mike Ringo. Mike showed the piece to me when he came to install his exhibit for the Coinage of the Americas Conference on circulating counterfeits of the Americas. As we were installing the exhibit, Tony Terranova arrived to install his exhibit as well. I called out, "Hey Tony, look at this," and handed him the 1818 endless wreath counterfeit cent. Tony looked it over and said to Mike, gruffly, "If you ever want to sell this, think of me." A few years later the cent did change hands, and became the Maris-Ringo-Terranova example. A coin that had been hidden for over a century had been turned up by Mike Ringo.

That is what it was like being with Mike; you would sit down with him, and by the end of the session he would have shown you things that required the re-writing of Breen's encyclopedia or of the *Red Book*. And he found these things ALL THE TIME.

Even when Mike came across common coins, he would find them in unusual quantities. Wood 33 is the commonest type of Canadian "blacksmith copper." Mike found a huge accumulation of Wood 33s. He tried to sell them to one collector of Canadian blacksmiths. The collector said, "Mike, what would I do with all these Wood 33s?" Mike replied, "I don't know, maybe you could use them for a doorstep?" Last I knew the "doorstop" had been sold to Skip Smith, and he and Phil Mossman were conducting metrological analyses of the pieces, which showed that Wood 33, despite its crude appearance, had been made by a sophisticated manufacturing operation. At the Baltimore ANA in 1993, Mike showed me some beautiful uncirculated regal George II halfpence and farthings, which, alas, I did not buy.

Mike had started as a collector of error coinage, and then shifted into collecting counterfeits. He once told me that an evasive halfpenny that he had found that was dated 1969 was what had inspired him to begin his counterfeit collection. (I learned about his collection of Frisbees only after his death.) In 1992 a piece came up that crossed over his two interests. This was a double brockage, with the obverse and reverse of a coin pressed into the planchet. It was consigned as an error for auction at the Orlando ANA, and then withdrawn as a false error. Mike told me that he thought that pieces like that were not modern fakes made for error collectors, but a cheap way of making a circulating counterfeit in the nineteenth century – at a time when much of the population was illiterate, such a coin could well pass.

Mike was also a gifted photographer, with much interest in the history of photography. When I began to do research on California private gold coinage, Mike told me that he had once discovered and sold a photograph of James King, of Wm., the muckraking newspaper editor of San Francisco. It was not a full photograph – it was just a photograph of his leg, upon which James King, of Wm., was holding one of his children. The ANS has a good collection of early U.S. political memorabilia, many made by putting small tintype photographs of the candidates into a badge; Mike was very interested in these, and considered publishing something about them.

Even when Mike said something critical he said it in such a nice way that you could not possibly take offense. He pointed out to me, very tactfully, that the Virginia halfpence attributions on the boxes in the ANS collection were not correct. By that time I was advanced enough in die attribution to undertake the daunting task of attributing Virginia halfpence. I puzzled over those coins for several days, and eventually I realized that the tray must have been dropped at some point, and the coins put back into the wrong boxes. Then I had to consult early file photographs of the trays to see what the original arrangement had been, and carefully transfer the coins into the right boxes and re-attribute them. At the end the ANS had an orderly collection of Virginia halfpence, with correct attributions and correct provenances – and I was able to attribute Virginia halfpence (with a lot of effort). And all that had begun because Mike had looked at the tray, and in twenty seconds had recognized that the Virginia halfpence were misattributed. He did not do

this with a copy of Newman's die study or the Picker catalog; he had Virginia halfpence die varieties *memorized*.

Mike's tactfulness was such that he was often used as an intermediary in difficult cases, such as when a fake coin got sold by accident (and slabbed, to boot), and a whole series of transactions needed to be unwound. His ability at grading and evaluation, plus the trust that collectors reposed in him, meant that he was asked to grade and evaluate some of the most closely held collections. The coinages of the colonial and Confederation periods can be a fertile ground for some extraordinarily bizarre numismatic theories. Mike would quickly summarize these theories, and then give a gentle, bemused laugh. That gentle, bemused laugh spoke louder than any lengthy screed denouncing the theories.

Mike did not like public speaking, but I drafted him into giving a presentation at the November 1998 Coinage of the Americas Conference on circulating counterfeits of the Americas. Numismatists tend to focus on unique pieces, on small distinctions, on unusual varieties. They tend to be very good at the "zoom in" function, but lack a "zoom out" function that can give the big picture. The key to doing a public presentation is to use the "zoom out" function; one will never be able to discuss every variety in twenty minutes or half an hour, so one has to use the "zoom out" to discuss four or five major groups or highlights of the series. Mike had just made many great discoveries – he had turned up a set of counterfeiters' eight-*reales* dies, he unwound the numerous different attributions of the Connecticut copper variety Miller 2.4-T – but the talk lacked a "zoom out" function that would have made it into a good presentation. I wish we had had the time to reshape that presentation into a published paper; anything Mike published was a valuable contribution. The ANS taped talks as a rule, so there may still be a tape of Mike's talk in the ANS library or archives.

Our most extensive collaboration was the die study of counterfeit 2 reales. Mike was ahead of me on these as he was in so much else – he had a collection of several dozen such counterfeits before I even began studying the pieces and had also identified many die links before I did. Mike had in his collection some outstanding pieces of the 2 reales series, such as a 1791 counterfeit, ostensibly from the mint of Zacatecas, variety 91B-Z1. The ANS also has this variety, but in much lower grade. There are not many circulating counterfeits that make a collector say "Wow!" – the usual reaction of the uninitiated collector to a circulating counterfeit is "Ugh, gross!" Mike's 91B-Z1 was one of those coins that would make even the uninitiated collector say, "Wow!" After my first arrangement of the material, the ANS had about fifty varieties; Mike had about fifty varieties; there were thirty varieties where there was overlap between the two collections, and each collection had about twenty varieties that the other collection did not have. While I worked on the die study Mike was out collecting the pieces with even more assiduity. It was difficult to complete the die study, because every time I got the study done and the die chains arranged, Mike would discover a new specimen with new die links that upset the entire arrangement. I never quite solved this problem – instead I arbitrarily said, "enough," and went into print. It has been a great pleasure to see how useful the die study has proved to be; it made a good prediction of the universe of die varieties of counterfeit 2 reales. Keith Davignon published an excellent die study of counterfeit bust half dollars, comprising 188 varieties. Three years after Davignon published his book, 75 new varieties had been discovered. New varieties have not been discovered in the 2 reales series at that rate. The reason the original die study was so comprehensive was due, in a large measure, to Mike Ringo's assiduousness in tracking down varieties of 2 reales.

Mike's last visit to me at the ANS was on August 21, 1999. I was so tired that afternoon that I barely recognized what he had in the two-by-two box he put before me. One piece was a crude counterfeit halfpenny, very low grade, plus it had a hole in it. My only thought was, "Why is Mike

wasting my time, having me look at this piece of junk?" Finally (after cheating by looking at what was written on the envelope) it dawned on me that I was looking at a Vlack 10-77A – a piece that some five years previously I had thought to be unique. "Mike, didn't this coin used to be unique?" "Oh, there's probably at least three or four now – the one you knew of, this one, maybe one or two others. But on this specimen the ribbons are visible, and looking at the ribbons I think it may be the work of Mould & Atlee after all." The piece was later sold as lot 64 of the McCawley and Grellman 2000 auction. The section known as "the Albany Collection" (lots 48 through 90) comprised Mike's collection of Machins pieces.

In 2000 I left the ANS and started law school, so I did not see Mike much after that. The last time I saw him was on August 3, 2002, at the New York ANA convention. As usual he had some amazing discoveries to share with me. Mike had discovered a new 1785 Connecticut variety: variety 5.7-G. It was dug up near Albany by someone who used to call Mike up and ask him to attribute his finds. Then the finder decided he could do better by cutting Mike out and putting his finds directly on E-Bay – so he put it up and Mike grabbed it. If he had called Mike and asked him to attribute it, Mike would have told him and he would have made a lot more money. This turn of events quite amused Mike.

Mike had also discovered a mule of the Georgius Triumpho with a counterfeit 1767 Dansk Amerikanske skilling reverse, a new colonial type. The die axis was 8 o'clock; the Georgius Triumpho side is oddly broadstruck. He consigned it to McCawley & Grellman. Mike observed to me: they were making Georgius Triumpho and Dansk Amerikanske counterfeits in Birmingham, both dies show late states, we know the Georgius Triumpho reverse is badly broken, so they salvaged what they could and put those two dies together.

He told me at the ANA that he had been sick, and I could see that some of his hair had lost its pigmentation, but I had assumed that he had recovered from whatever he had, and that he would be around for many more years. There were so many more projects to do, like counterfeit 8 reales and coin-type buttons. When I first began to research coin-type buttons Mike brought one in that turned out to be a Spanish American medal commemorating a cockfighting arena. On all of these areas I could count on Mike's knowledge, his interest, and his remarkably deep collections (after all, how many collectors are there that have medals commemorating cockfighting arenas?). Mike started a Yahoo e-group on counterfeit 2 reales, and his every posting was filled with practicality and common sense. He was always ready to recommend useful books and to help out newbies. His attributions were always sound. From what I saw of his posts in the autumn of 2006 he seemed in very fine fettle. I was shocked – we all were – when he suddenly died at the beginning of 2007.

MIKE RINGO  
 BOX 3010  
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1788 V.23-88A G	35.00
1788 V.23-88A F, dark surfaces	50.00
1788 V.23-88A, nice VF	125.00
Nova Eborac 1787 F-VF, weakly struck reverse, half of date shows, even brown color, no problems	135.00
Nova Constellatio 1783 pointed rays, small U.S., choice VF-XF	150.00
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## 1748-dated Counterfeit British Halfpenny Source Identified

by

Robert L. Bowser; Hudson, OH

### Introduction

For more than a decade there has been increasingly detailed research aimed at elucidating the types, styles and varieties of British copper halfpence which predominated during the post-American Revolutionary period in England and in the former North American colonies. Internet-based research groups<sup>1</sup> have created several photographic databases and informational folders with images and individual member produced presentations. Great strides have been made in detecting similarities of style, form, and attributes for more than 30 family groupings of British counterfeit and evasion halfpence seen among the collections of the participants. This paper will review some of the written evidence concerning the clandestine production of illegally made halfpence from English criminal court records which has been greatly assisted by the creation and availability of Internet based archives.

The focus of this paper will be the formulation of a theory concerning the location and by whom a group of related counterfeits was made, as well as a discussion of tools and production methods.<sup>2</sup> Records of the actual prosecution of individual counterfeiters and examination of extant halfpence examples are utilized to substantiate the study. This paper focuses on a small group of related counterfeit halfpennies dated 1748 and found in the collections of the various research group members.

### British Court Records

The opportunities for Internet research have opened up new avenues for information sharing and have spurred the generation of searchable databases of historical records. One such undertaking of great value to this study was compiled from a number of law school libraries which brought together the actual court proceedings from the British Central Criminal Court in London. This project was completed in 2003 and was sponsored by professors at the University of Sheffield and the University of Hertfordshire, and provides a searchable database of thousands of criminal trial proceedings from 1674 to 1834. Information regarding trials about counterfeiting of English and Irish coins can be found on the website named *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org)) and are intended for individual research, restricted use, and not for commercial sales. See the site information for further details on site development, history, and terms of use.

Information on actual court prosecutions for coining is plentiful within the Old Bailey records, containing testimony from a group of officers in and around London that focuses on the exchange (uttering in court terms) and forging of the king's coinage. Other known locations which were the source of spurious coppers in England, such as Birmingham or Soho, do not seem to have as complete court records detailing the arrests and convictions of persons who broke the law. Nevertheless, there have been a few studies regarding these locations and the people involved

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1 Yahoo eGroups: Nonregalresearch, Evasions, and CNLF (now closed) located on the Internet at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/>. These groups are member only access.

2 For an excellent overview of British counterfeit coppers, see Lou Jordan's website at <http://www.coins.nd.edu/ColCoin/ColCoinIntros/CtfBrit.info.html>. The website is sponsored by University of Notre Dame Libraries, Department of Special Collections.

with counterfeit coinage in the eighteenth century leading up to the royal coinage contract with Samuel Boulton, along with estimates of counterfeit coin production.<sup>3</sup> Boulton's Soho Manufactory was a haven of skilled engravers and manufacturing workers who may have produced tools and dies on their own time for counterfeit operations. This conclusion is based upon similarities in central device design and legend punches found on examples of counterfeit coppers believed to be from Birmingham sources. Also, William Lutwyche, who is purported to have manufactured numerous copper advertising tokens and evasive imitations of halfpence, operated outside the London area court systems and had sufficient resources and engravers with skills to play a big part in counterfeit halfpence production.

Discussion as to whether counterfeit coppers are American or English in origin has been addressed by others in prior *CNL* publications and will not be addressed within this paper.<sup>4</sup> There is, along the lines of court evidence, some factual information for a particular set of dated examples that can be attributed to a specific time and location, along with named defendants. This is the first attempt to bring this evidence to the forefront regarding the makers of specific varieties of generic counterfeit coppers and is particularly exciting evidence for their attribution.

### **The Old Bailey Court Proceedings Regarding 1748-dated Counterfeit Halfpence**

On August 27, 1796, Mary Jones, John Ayscough, and William Mendham were arrested by officers John Armstrong, John Wray, Samuel Harper, and William Peach. They were indicted for coining a piece of false money, to the likeness of a halfpenny. The testimony of the officers and defendants was given at the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey on September 14, 1796, and is transcribed in the Old Bailey online proceedings, Reference Number t17960914-86. Since the testimony is somewhat repetitive, a summary follows.

The defendants were found in the process of coining in the cellar of a house at No. 1 Nottingham-Court, King Street, London. Ayscough, who was without his shirt and hat, and Mendham, who was without a waistcoat, had to be pursued and captured as they ran away upon the officers entering the house. The woman ran upstairs in the house where she was apprehended. The officers found the defendant's hands and clothes to be black and greasy as though they had been at work coining. Upon entering the cellar of the house the officers found the stamping press hidden behind a curtain with dies fixed and still warm with a counterfeit halfpenny between them. On searching the cellar further a great quantity of halfpence were found as well as a quantity of blanks ready to be imprinted. Also found in the cellar was a trouncing bag hung for use with sawdust and oil to take the brightness off newly struck halfpence.

Upstairs on a mantle was found a bag worth five shillings of completed halfpence and in the wainscot a number of misstruck halfpence not really fit for circulation. Also, a woman's shawl was found in the cellar along with a bag of halfpence. Officer Wray explained that the dies and the halfpence matched exactly and the court observed that the head of the king on the die was the present King George III and the date under Britannia was 1748. Officer Harper related that he saw the other officers take halfpence in evidence from the defendants and that the halfpence felt greasy and blackened their thumbs and fingers. Upon Ayscough, in addition to the counterfeit halfpence, they found a copper with only the head struck up from a different obverse die than what was in the press, and the reverse was blank. The defendants were found guilty, fined one shilling, and imprisoned at Newgate Prison for one year.

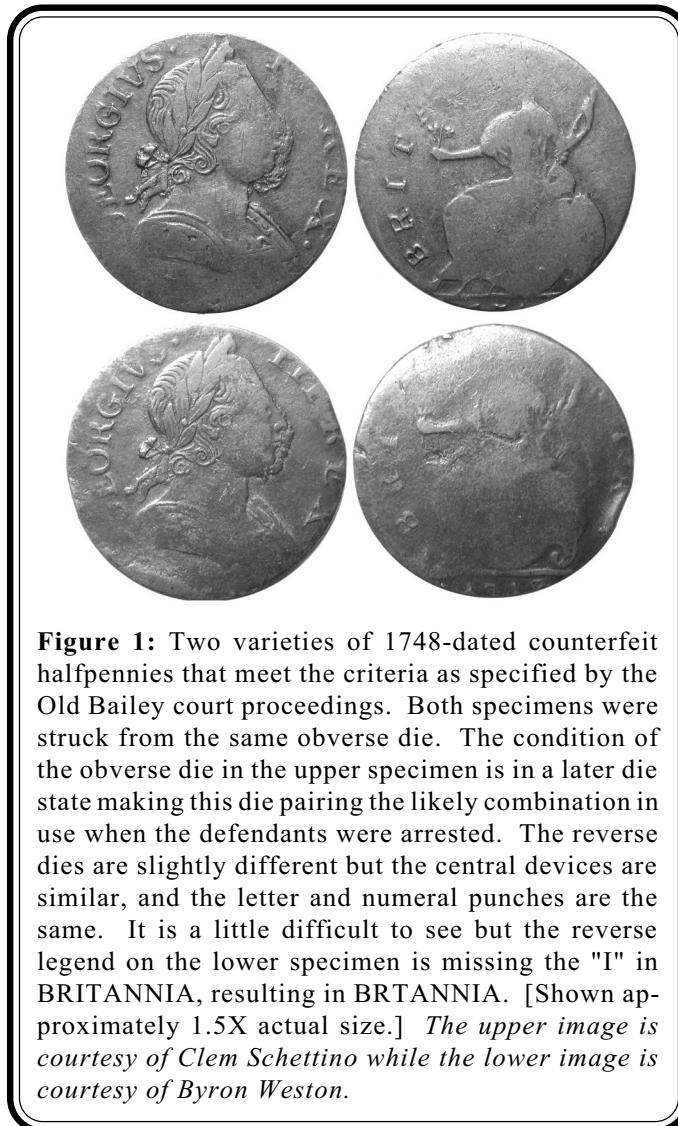
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3 Smith, Dr. Charles W., "The English George III Contemporary Counterfeit Halfpenny: A Statistical Study of Production and Distribution," *Coinage of the American Confederation Period*, Philip L. Mossman, Ed., Coinage of the Americas Conference, Proceedings No. 11, The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1996.

4 Weston, Byron K., "Evasion Hybrids: The Missing Link," *The Colonial Newsletter: A Research Journal in Early American Numismatics*, Serial No. 111, Volume 39, No. 2, August 1999.

### Counterfeit Halfpenny Matching the Court Description

The court's observation concerning the dies and halfpence seized from No. 1 Nottingham-Court, King Street, London, on August 27, 1796, is a significant clue as to identifying the counterfeit coppers produced at that location. The court record states that "The head is that of the present King, and the Britannia is of the date 1748." The king of England in 1796 was George III while the date of 1748 on the coin occurred during the reign of George II. Thus, the court is describing a counterfeit halfpenny produced from two unrelated dies, otherwise known as a muling.



**Figure 1:** Two varieties of 1748-dated counterfeit halfpennies that meet the criteria as specified by the Old Bailey court proceedings. Both specimens were struck from the same obverse die. The condition of the obverse die in the upper specimen is in a later die state making this die pairing the likely combination in use when the defendants were arrested. The reverse dies are slightly different but the central devices are similar, and the letter and numeral punches are the same. It is a little difficult to see but the reverse legend on the lower specimen is missing the "I" in BRITANNIA, resulting in BRTANNIA. [Shown approximately 1.5X actual size.] *The upper image is courtesy of Clem Schettino while the lower image is courtesy of Byron Weston.*

A survey of extant counterfeit halfpence meeting the above criteria has yielded two possible matches. They are both a George III obverse muled to two different George II 1748-dated reverses and are shown in Figure 1. The obverse die is from a very extensive grouping of counterfeit halfpence known as the Young Head Family. As can be seen, the obverse die is in a very late die state where the die is crumbling in front of the king's face and also in the ribbon area at the back of his neck. Since the preceding court testimony indicates that Ayscough, Mendham, and Jones were a "small time" operation, it is likely they obtained this die after it was discarded by a much larger operation, that being the people who are responsible for the many varieties of counterfeit halfpence that make up the Young Head Family. The reverse dies are from a completely different hand as shown by the style of the central devices and legend letter punches. Unfortunately, the court record does not identify who supplied or engraved the dies used by Ayscough, Mendham, and Jones. Also, numismatists have long recognized that certain counterfeit coppers were purposely backdated by their

makers. The preceding court case leaves no doubt about this practice as the reverse die in question was probably made in 1796, or at the very least in the 1790s, but dated 1748.

It is logical to assume that groups of halfpenny varieties where the dies are linked together were produced by the same coinage operation. Therefore, other halfpence varieties in addition to those shown in Figure 1 might be attributed to the Ayscough, Mendham, and Jones operation.

Possibly one of the misstruck specimens found behind the wainscoting. This is a reverse brockage with a straight edge clip. *Image courtesy of Clem Schettino.*



48A-48A

George III / George II mule that meets the court criteria. Later obverse die state than the below specimen. *Image courtesy of Clem Schettino.*



1-48A

George III / George II mule that meets the court criteria. Earlier obverse die state than the above specimen. *Image courtesy of Byron Weston.*



1-48B

The same reverse die as the above specimen but married to a George II obverse die. *Image courtesy of Byron Weston.*



2-48B

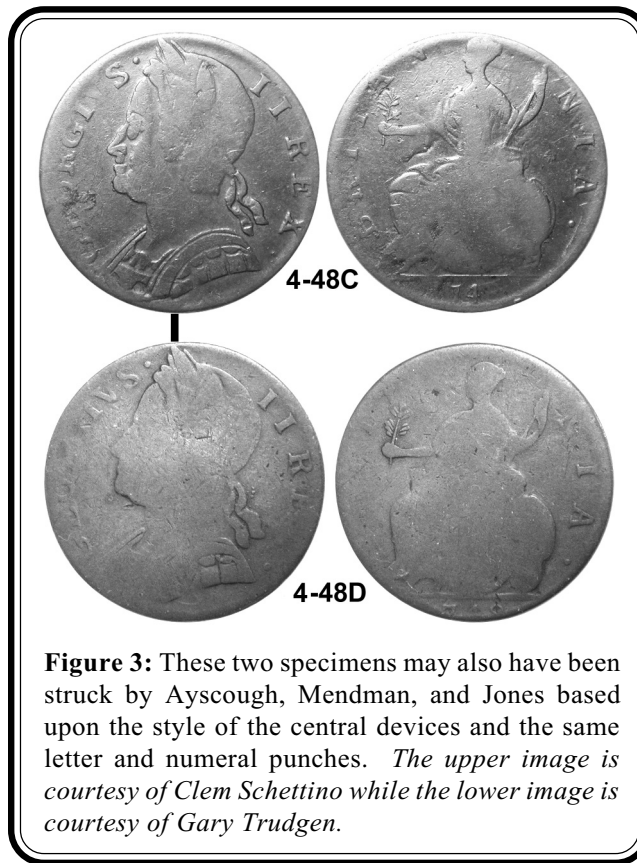
The same reverse die as the first muling (1-48A) but married to a George II obverse die. *Image courtesy of Dan Burleson.*



3-48A

**Figure 2:** Die linkage plate of the 1748-dated halfpenny group that is attributed to the counterfeiting operation located at No. 1 Nottingham-Court, King Street, London in 1796.





For ease of discussion, arbitrary labels have been given to the two coins that meet the court criteria; that being obverse 1 for the George III die and 48A and 48B for the two reverse dies. Refer to Figure 2 for a plate illustrating two other die combinations that were undoubtedly struck at No.1 Nottingham-Court, King Street, London. These are shown as varieties 2-48B and 3-48A. Ligature lines show how the dies are connected plus a brockage specimen is shown of the 48A reverse die. Figure 3 shows two more die combinations that may have been struck by Ayscough, Mendham, and Jones. This conclusion, however, is based on style which is not as reliable as die linkage for determining provenance. Perhaps in the future a new die combination specimen will be found that will tie the two groups together, providing more conclusive evidence that the specimens shown in Figure 3 were indeed struck by the defendants.

### Source of Dies and Tools

The Old Bailey court record provides a detailed account of the arrest and evidence against the 1748 halfpenny counterfeiters, but leaves the lingering question of how they came into possession of the tools and dies required for the operation. The defendants named in the some 60 copper coinage-related cases before the Old Bailey between 1774 and 1799 were probably not skilled engravers and machinists with the ability to create the press works and dies they put into use. Thus, there was apparently a source, outside the reach of the London officers, supplying these tools to those who would undertake this risky business. Being well into the British Industrial Revolution in the 1770s and 1780s, the logical direction to look for these skills would be the tradesmen in the jewelry and button manufacturing operations in Birmingham, England.

Birmingham had long been a hotbed of illicit counterfeit halfpence production as shown by a letter published by the *Gentleman's Magazine* in November 1752.<sup>5</sup> In a letter to the editor of the magazine, it is stated that around 1745 a mint official from London visited Birmingham and had several people arrested and prosecuted for making counterfeit halfpence. The author of the letter went on to complain that these arrests did not stop others from continuing to manufacture counterfeit halfpence and that, seven years later, the practice was at epidemic proportions.

Testimony from another case before the court at the Old Bailey, given in 1775, describes traveling to Birmingham to obtain the press equipment and returning to London to install it into the

<sup>5</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, ed. by Sylvanus Urban, London, vol. 22 (November 1752), p. 500. Letter from E. Z. of Birmingham dated November 25 titled "Counterfeit Halfpence mischief and gain by."

defendant's home. The trial proceedings for this case are found under Reference Number t17750531-55 and the testimony of the officers and defendants is summarized below.

On May 20, 1775, four men were arrested, Richard Chapman, Stephen Knowles, Thomas Fretwell, and Benjamin Hipwell, for counterfeiting halfpence. The coinage operation was at Thomas Fretwell's house on Harrow Hill Common which consisted of three row houses with only one entrance because the other two doors were nailed shut. The arresting officers found the workshop at the end of the third house which was accessed through a way broken through the upstairs of the adjoining houses. In the workshop they found a coining press with dies in it and a counterfeit halfpenny resting between the dies. They stated that one of the dies had a defect and a like defect was found on the recovered counterfeit halfpence. Also, they found a cutting press used to cut the copper blanks, some plates of copper, and other copper plates with the blanks cut out.

Thomas Causam, who was not arrested, testified that Cornelius Robins engraved all of the dies for the operation. Robins was a sinker of dies for pocketbook clasps and was arrested at his home in London on May 24 where the officers found him in the act of making a die.

Causam's testimony is particularly informative and interesting. He starts by stating that he and Richard Chapman, one of the defendants, traveled to Birmingham the week after Christmas, 1774, and purchased two presses, presumably the coinage and cutting presses. The presses were delivered the week after Easter and installed in Fretwell's house and coining ensued. Causam goes on to say that they made about £12 worth of halfpence in a day's time. At 24 halfpence per shilling and 20 shillings per pound, this equates to 5760 halfpence per day. If they worked 12 hour days, which was typical for this period, eight halfpennies were made per minute or a halfpenny every 7.5 seconds. Causam states that his job was to seed the press, meaning that he would flick off a struck halfpenny from the lower die and then put a blank in its place. Finally, he says that Robins was paid 2 guineas for each pair of dies that he made for the operation.

All five men were found guilty and sent to prison for one year. Apparently Thomas Causam was not charged since he testified against the other men. Also, from this court record we learn the name of an engraver, Cornelius Robins, who prepared dies used to strike counterfeit halfpence. It is very likely that Robin's dies were dated 1775 since regal halfpence were still being struck at this time and there would have been no need to backdate the dies. If only a description of the die defect had been given, it might also be possible to attribute specific counterfeit halfpence varieties to this operation.

At this time, the Old Bailey was the central criminal judicial court but other cities had magistrates and lower courts whose records are not currently available online. There may not have been a sufficiently organized police presence, however, to investigate and identify the sources of the tools since central police organizations, like Scotland Yard, were not in existence yet. Many of the cases and arrests resulted from an individual complaint of the passing or uttering of forged coins. By and large, the majority of the 60 or so cases processed by the Old Bailey for stamping halfpence or farthings were from presses set up in individual homes and not more sophisticated workplaces like the workshops maintained by Boulton and Watts or other Birmingham token and button makers.

## Conclusion

The testimony given in the trial of Ayscough, Mendham, and Jones (Old Bailey No. t17960914-86) provides a good description of the dies employed by this counterfeiting operation at the time of their arrest. As a result, from the extant specimens known today, it can be determined with some confidence which 1748-dated halfpence were struck by these individuals. What is not known is where they obtained their coinage dies, press, and copper blanks. But, as shown by another case in the Old Bailey, it is most likely that the coinage press was obtained in Birmingham and the dies were prepared by an engraver located in either the London or Birmingham area. Nevertheless, for the first time, the source of a small group of counterfeit halfpence has been identified, thanks to detailed legal proceedings that have been made available on the Internet. This small group of 1748-dated specimens, which are relatively scarce today, has taken on an added dimension since it is now known when and by whom they were made.

It appears that most of the arrests in the London court records for counterfeit halfpence production were of "small time" operations. It is likely that these operations are responsible for many of the smaller groups of similar counterfeit halfpence found today that are tied together through die linkage and style. Larger groups of similar counterfeit halfpence were probably the efforts of more organized, bigger operations located in or near the Birmingham area, and supported by multiple engravers and press operators. It is possible, however, that a handful of London felons escaped detection or returned to their clandestine craft after serving prison time, resulting in the production of a larger group of similar counterfeit coppers. In the Fretwell operation (Old Bailey No. t17750531-55) it is calculated that they coined 5760 halfpence per day, based on court testimony, resulting in as many as 250,000 halfpence in the 40 days or so of their operation. Thus, if a "small time" London operation went undetected for an extensive period of time they could have also produced a sizeable quantity of counterfeit halfpence.

Additional study of eighteenth century London court records is warranted as they may provide more fascinating information concerning clandestine coinage operations. It is probable that we will continue to learn the names of the people responsible for these illegal coinages with the ultimate objective of identifying the source of additional groups of similar halfpence. As a bonus, we may also learn interesting tidbits about each coinage operation, such as the use of a trouncing bag to take the shine off newly struck coppers.

